

Fairmont Dairy Complex
154-216 North Broadway
Green Bay
Brown County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-310

HABS
WIS,
5-GREBA,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HABS
WIS,
5-GREBA,
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Fairmont Dairy Complex

Location: 154 - 216 North Broadway Street, Green Bay, Brown County, Wisconsin.

Present Use: Vacant. Projected demolition date: summer, 1989.

Present Owner: Green Bay Redevelopment Authority, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Date of Construction:

310-A	1928	310-D	1919
310-B	ca. 1880; major alteration in 1928		
310-C	1917; addition in 1923		

Significance: The Fairmont Dairy forms an industrial complex located within the Broadway Historic District, which is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Dairying has been the primary agricultural industry for Brown County throughout the 20th century, and the Fairmont buildings are among the few remaining local indicators of the industry's importance during early years of large scale operations. Fairmont contributed to the local economy through employment of up to 225 persons as well as by purchasing raw goods from area farmers for approximately 65 years. The buildings were built when the Broadway Street district was an active commercial center for the west side of Green Bay, and contributed to the growth of Green Bay as an industrial and distribution center. All those remaining commercial and industrial buildings along the west bank of the Fox River, such as the Fairmont complex, are now threatened by continuing local efforts to replace aging structures in the deteriorating Broadway Street area.

Historian: Polly B. Athan, June 1989

Historical Information

The Fairmont Creamery Company was organized in 1884 by Wallace Wheeler and Joseph H. Rushton in Fairmont, Nebraska. Due to a lack of raw goods, it operated only in spring and summer during its first years. However, area farmers were increasingly turning to dairying and the Fairmont Co. grew concurrently through both expansion and acquisition. By the early twentieth century the company had branch plants in several states and relocated its headquarters to Omaha.¹ Joseph Rushton, first as secretary-treasurer and then as president of the firm from 1889-1921, saw Fairmont Creamery grow to become one of the largest dairy industries in the world, with offices in New York and other U.S. and European cities. In 1926, annual business approximated 30 million.²

As part of this rapid expansion, Fairmont entered the Green Bay market in 1915 as the Green Bay Cheese Company, a small wholesale cheese concern. The move into Wisconsin followed the rapid growth of dairying in Brown County (and the entire state of Wisconsin) during the last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century. Soil depletion and progressively diminishing yields caused the wheat industry to decline and farmers increasingly turned to commercial dairying. In addition, the Babcock butterfat test, invented in Wisconsin by Stephen M. John Babcock in 1890, provided an accurate means of ascertaining the percentage of butterfat content in cream, thus promoting the trend toward dairying. The increasing amount of milk produced led to growing numbers of processing plants built in the 1880s and after. During the first two decades of this century, Wisconsin became the leading dairy state in the U.S.³

In Green Bay, the new wholesale cheese company, managed by Fred Wright, operated out of the Leicht Transfer and Storage Building at 118-20 North Broadway Street (no longer extant).⁴ In 1917 the firm reincorporated with \$100,000 in capital, retaining Fred Wright as manager but changing the company's name to Fairmont Creamery Company. The business

immediately began construction of a five-story cold storage building at 200 N. Broadway, HABS No. 310-C (see photo 310-C-1). Harry Lawrie of Omaha provided the design and specifications⁵. The Fabry Construction Company of Green Bay built the 56' x 100' structure as well as an adjacent 50' x 50' one-story boiler house at a cost of \$125,000.⁶ With larger quarters the company expanded their line to include wholesale eggs and egg storage as well as commercial cold storage.⁷

In 1919 the Green Bay Fairmont Creamery Company branch built an addition to house a power plant, HABS No. 310-D (see photo 310-D-1) and added a creamery operation. Four years later the company erected an identical five-story addition to the immediate northeast (see photo 310-C-2) of the five-story 1917 structure, replacing the 1917 boiler house.⁸ While most early cheese factories and creameries were small, one-story firms, often attached to the owner's home, by the early 1900s production began to be concentrated in large processing plants. Creameries in particular tended to be larger in scale as they required a larger volume of milk and thus a more highly capitalized operation than small cheese factories.⁹ Fairmont typified this trend.

In 1925, Fairmont Creamery bought out the Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy Company, one block to the south at 156 North Broadway Street, and they expanded into the wholesale and retail milk and ice cream field. By 1920, the dairying industry was Wisconsin's largest in terms of output value, and Fairmont was sharing in this prosperity.¹⁰ Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy was begun by Edward Barclay of Green Bay in 1909 on a very small scale, with four employees and two delivery wagons, at 156 N. Broadway. The structure housing the new business was built sometime before 1883, when it was used by a paint factory and for grain storage.¹¹ A 1916 photo of the two-story structure in the Green Bay Press-Gazette shows a flat roof, eight round arched windows (each with a prominent keystone) on the second floor, and two doors, a garage door, and large display windows on the first floor. A horse drawn wagon is parked in front of the building in a similar 1915 photograph, ready

to deliver Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy goods.¹²

Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy incorporated in 1913 with capital of \$10,000, 16 employees, and a wholesale and retail line consisting of pasteurized milk, cream, ice cream, cottage cheese, and butter. The company boasted eight wagons at that time and business covering a 50-mile radius.¹³ Advertisements for Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy from the 1910s promoted the company's "Purity" line and emphasized sanitary, clean products. A 1916 description of the company claimed that Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy was "filled with the most modern machinery and equipment and always kept in the most sanitary condition."¹⁴ The early 1900s were critical years in the development of milk sanitation; pasteurizing to curb disease-producing organisms in milk was becoming widespread to counter the threat of tuberculosis and other diseases associated with milk. However, in 1916, more than 1/4 the milk sold in Green Bay was still not pasteurized.¹⁵ Thus, Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy publicized its cleanliness and use of the most modern technology.

By 1917, Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy employed 30 men, and had built a two-story boiler and engine room addition to the older structure with a 65' smokestack - the first concrete smokestack built in Green Bay (no longer extant).¹⁶ In addition, the firm built a new wood wagon house directly across Broadway Street to house 10-12 horses and wagons, as well as sleighs used to deliver their dairy products in winter. The firm delivered directly to customers' homes, restaurants, and grocery stores.¹⁷

Soon after the Fairmont Creamery bought the Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy Company in 1925 they began a major alteration and expansion effort. In 1928 the local H.J. Selmer Company expanded the ca. 1880 building by adding a third floor and expanding north to Hubbard Street approximately 50', then unified the older structure by extending the new building's facade south to include the original building (HABS No. 310-B). The new building (see photo 310-B-1) was erected to house Fairmont's milk and ice cream plant and its company offices. (The 200 Broadway building block continued to house cold storage and

butter making facilities.) A one-story garage building (see photo 310-A-1) to house the company's truck fleet was built adjacent to the new building directly to the south at 154 North Broadway (HABS No. 310-A).¹⁸

At this time, Green Bay's Fairmont plant had further expanded to produce and/or distribute pasteurized milk, ice cream, cream, butter, buttermilk, cottage cheese, cheese, powdered milk, mayonnaise, salad dressings, frozen fruits, poultry, frozen fish, and oysters. The firm advertised the catering of unique ice cream specialty desserts and their line of "Delicia" ice cream products. Both in and out-going shipments were carried by rail (a track ran along the east side of the building) as well as truck.¹⁹

Renamed to reflect its increased line, the Fairmont Foods Company (headquartered in Omaha since 1907) now had 11 manufacturing plants in eight states, including its one in Wisconsin.²⁰ The Green Bay plant, with 140 employees, was one of the city's largest industries. In 1934, it claimed to have paid area farmers 15 1/2 million dollars for cream, milk, and eggs during the 1923-1933 decade, and to have paid employees over two million dollars over the same time period. A contemporary photo of the building in the Green Bay Press-Gazette shows a large delivery truck fleet lined up along the Hubbard Street loading dock side of building 310-B, and a huge advertising milk bottle model displayed atop the five-story building at 200 North Broadway. A drawing of the plant in approximately 1934 is included in this report.²¹ The plant operated with steam heat and electric power and lights.²²

Fairmont Foods employed 225 workers in the 1940s, and distributed throughout northeast Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.²³ During the 1950s the firm was described by the Press-Gazette as "the largest of Green Bay's dairies," of which there were approximately 15.²⁴ For a few years, the Wheeler Cheese Company, a Borden subsidiary, manufactured and sold processed cheese and packaged mail-order cheese gifts out of the

200 N. Broadway building. Its president, Charles Woody, also offered his processed cheese at the outlet store at 156 N. Broadway, a retail shop begun in the early 1950s, for a few years. Eventually his operation moved to Waupaca, Wisconsin. Fairmont continued operating its dairy outlet store until 1983.²⁵

Fairmont Foods Company, by then based in Houston and for a time a Fortune 500 company, continued to operate the Green Bay plant during the 1960s and 1970s. However, problems occurring within the parent company in the 1960s led to an unsatisfactory return on investors' capital and a careful evaluation of all manufacturing plants. The company by the 1970s operated 14 plants nationwide, but all were in trouble. According to Fairmont Foods officials, milk consumption was in a decline, and the level of consumption of other dairy products was remaining constant instead of showing growth. In addition, consumers refused to pay higher prices for dairy goods although farmers were demanding higher prices for raw goods. Internal operating problems were also cited by the company. The parent company experienced a loss in its dairy plant group during almost every year of the 1960s and 1970s, despite cutting back to emphasize lowfat milk and cottage cheese (yogurt was also manufactured in some plants) in order to appeal to the health conscious, and to fruit drinks which used the same production and processing equipment as milk. However, Fairmont announced plans to modernize and expand the Green Bay plant, though its employment ranks were back down to 130 by 1979.²⁶

Fairmont Foods finally decided to sell all of their dairy plants; they sold the Green Bay factory to Marigold Foods, Inc., in 1980. Marigold, based in Minneapolis with a principal territory consisting of the midwestern states, now began to market the Green Bay plant's milk, cottage cheese, and ice cream products under the "Kemps" label. The new owner claimed that it planned no changes in the plant's operations, procedures or sources, and it continued to serve northeast Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula. In fact, Marigold said that the acquisition would strengthen the Green Bay operation, and they attempted to obtain

city approval to close Hubbard Street east of Broadway Street in order to connect the two dairy buildings with an addition.²⁷

However, in an effort to centralize distribution, Marigold closed the Green Bay plant in favor of another of its dairy plant in Kewaskum, closer to Milwaukee and Chicago. All production ceased in 1982 and the company auctioned off the plant's equipment and machinery. The Green Bay Redevelopment Authority bought the vacant structures from Marigold in 1988 at a cost of \$125,000 in Federal Community Block Grant funds as part of a plan to redevelop the area, much of which is vacant or in poor condition. Marigold continues to own a small garage across the street at 159 North Broadway, which Fairmont built to replace the Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy Company's earlier wood garage. Bids for demolition of the old Fairmont Creamery buildings were taken during the spring of 1989.²⁸

Biographical Information

Green Bay's Fairmont Creamery plant was locally managed by the following individuals: Frederick Wright (1915-1919), Forest Plott (1919-1945), Alvin Allison (1945 - ca. 1952), William Collison (ca. 1952- ca. 1958), Maurice Archer (ca. 1958-1964), and George Sanda (1964-1970). Bruce Church, George Sanda (operating out of Minneapolis), and Larry Gergens (operating out of Cedarburg, Wisconsin), managed the plant in its last years.²⁹

Of the above, Alvin Allison is notable for his involvement as Director and Vice President of the Wisconsin Milk Directors Association in the 1940s and as a Director of the Wisconsin Creameries Association (1946-1953).³⁰ George Sanda was President and a Director of the Wisconsin Dairy Food Association and joined Marigold Foods as Executive Vice President in 1979. Larry Gergens also transferred to Marigold, becoming Division Vice President, in 1979.³¹

The Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy Company was founded and managed until the time of its sale to Fairmont Creamery by Green Bay resident Edward Barclay.³²

Architect and Contractor Information

Architect Harry Lawrie designed the original Fairmont Creamery building, HABS No. 310-C, at 200 North Broadway Street. Lawrie was born and educated in Scotland, and studied architecture in Glasgow. He emigrated to the U.S. in the 1880s and began work in Chicago as draftsman in the Burnham and Root office. In 1886 he became head draftsman for William W. Clay's office in Chicago. Lawrie moved to Omaha in the early 1900s, where he provided the designs for the Fairmont Creamery Company's 1917 Green Bay plant. At the time of its building, the Green Bay Review called Lawrie an expert in cold storage construction. The 1923 addition to this building is very similar to the 1917 design. Lawrie was one of the charter members of the Nebraska Chapter - American Institute of Architects.³³

The general contractor for the original Fairmont Creamery building was Fabry Construction Company. The firm was begun in Green Bay by Belgian immigrant Louis Fabry in 1890; by 1911 Louis's son Henry joined the business. Fabry Construction Company was responsible for the masonry of many prominent buildings still extant in Green Bay, including St. John's R.C. Church, the Bellin building, and Howe Public School.³⁴

The architects of buildings 310-A and 310-B are unknown. However, we do know that the Henry J. Selmer Company was general contractor for the buildings, built in 1928. Henry Selmer began work in Green Bay as a contractor in 1905, and established the Henry J. Selmer Company in 1920. The thriving firm was reorganized as the Selmer Company in 1926 under the leadership of other individuals, and soon became the dominant Green Bay general contracting firm. The company continues to operate today. Selmer's 1928 Fairmont building incorporated a two-story pre-1883 structure which had housed the Green Bay Ice Cream and Dairy Company from 1909-1925, when it was bought by the Fairmont Creamery Company. The new construction extended the old building some 50' north to

Hubbard Street, added a third story, and unified the Broadway street facade. At the same time Selmer built a one-story garage adjacent to the building toward the south on Broadway.³⁵

Architectural Information

The original Fairmont Creamery building, at 200 N. Broadway Street (HABS No. 310-C) is an astylistic utilitarian reinforced concrete building with brick curtain walls, brick and concrete trim, and a concrete foundation. The five-story fireproof building has a steel frame and reinforced concrete structural system. The rectangular building has a flat false wood over concrete slab roof. It was originally built in 1917 for cold storage with the following dimensions: 62' along Broadway Street and 100' along Hubbard Street (see photo 310-C-1). A nearly identical 50' x 50' building, also of fireproof construction with brick walls, was built on Pearl Street in 1923 to the northeast side of the building. It housed the creamery plant, replacing a 1917 one-story brick boilerhouse. The first four floors on the Broadway facade are windowless; a beltcourse with brick denticulated molding below was placed between the fourth and fifth floors. The fifth floor originally included windows on its entire length but they were later filled in. A brick parapet above the fifth floor includes a sign bond.

The Hubbard Street facade is very similar except that the parapet has been covered with sheet metal for approximately half of its length and there are windows on all five floors of the southeast corner of the building. A concrete-loading platform with metal awning above runs along this Hubbard Street side of the building.

An enclosed iron conveyor, added between 1936 and 1957, runs between this building and building 310-B across Hubbard Street (see photo 310-B-2); finished products were transported through it from the 100 N. Broadway block to the 200 N. Broadway block for distribution and loading. An underground concrete tunnel was used by employees to cross Hubbard Street between the same buildings; it was included in the 1936 fire insurance map but not the 1932 insurance map so may have been constructed between those years.³⁶

In 1919, the Fairmont Foods Company built building 310-D, consisting of a loading room, engine room and boiler room (see photo 310-D-1). The one-story 50' x 50' loading room and combined 50' x 100' one-story engine room and two-story boiler room are all astylistic utilitarian buildings with steel frame masonry structural systems, concrete foundations, concrete floors, steel truss and gypsum slab roofs, brick walls, and brick and concrete trim. The Broadway Street facade of the engine room at the northwest corner of the building has three large metal sash industrial windows grouped under the stepped portion of the parapet above with an entrance door below the middle window. The loading room, the southwest portion of building 310-D, has four large intact garage doors facing Broadway Street with intact metal sash transom lights above each.³⁷

The three-story ice cream and milk plant at 156-62 North Broadway (HABS No. 310-B) was built in 1928 but encloses a two-story pre-1883 brick building (originally 50' x 80') at 156-58 N. Broadway. The major addition runs approximately 50' along Broadway and 100' along Hubbard, and its facade continued south approximately 50' along Broadway to unify the front of the old building with the new. The rear of the older building can be seen on the east side (see photos 310-B-2 and 310-A-2). The newer 1928 structure is astylistic utilitarian with fireproof construction; concrete frame, floors and flat roof; and brick curtain walls. It has brick and concrete trim and a reinforced concrete structural system. Its three stories of original metal sash industrial windows are in place in a number of windows; others have been filled in with glass brick. On the Broadway facade at 158 North Broadway is a pedimented entrance door (see photo 310-B-4) surround of concrete with pediment supported by scrolled consoles. The entrance door has sidelights and a transom light. At 156 N. Broadway is a retail store with metal awning occupying two bays at the first floor and demarcated by stucco finished walls surrounding the original display windows and entrance door (see photos 310-A-1 and 310-B-3).

The main walls of the building are pilastered with each floor having two concrete panels

for decoration placed on the pilaster at the window head height. The first and third floors also have raised T-shape concrete decoration plaques at window head level.

Building 310-A, also built in 1928, is a one-story astylistic utilitarian concrete block garage with concrete floors, brick facade, brick and concrete trim, brick foundation, and a flat wood truss roof (see photo 310-A-1). The rectangular building runs 50' along Broadway Street and 100' to the east. The garage door openings facing Broadway Street have been altered with later brick infill. The intact parapet has a corbelled brick panel and T-shaped raised concrete decoration plaques in the pilaster capitals. When built, the structure was capable of housing 20 cars.³⁸

Notes

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Drawing of Green Bay's Fairmont Creamery plant, lower right corner, from Fairmont Creamery Co.'s Half a Century publication. The buildings are reversed; the three-story "dairy building" to the left of the five story "creamery" should be to that bulding's right.

